



Photo by Eric Tasken

NEW EDITION: Morton Ann Gernsbacher became co-editor of *PSPI* in 2005.

Something to Talk About

New PSPI Co-Editor

Morton Ann Gernsbacher

*Hopes to Expand Public
Awareness of Psychology*

By Michael E. Newman

Communication has always come easily for Morton Ann Gernsbacher.

As a young girl in Dallas, Gernsbacher would carry on full-fledged conversations with every object in her room, including stuffed animals, bedposts, and crayons. Teachers in her elementary school were constantly reassigning her seat in a futile attempt to stifle her gregariousness. In high school, she spent at least four hours on the phone each night. College found her predominantly signing up for classes that included discussion sessions. She even chatted through the entire 13.1 miles of her first half marathon.

It seems that Gernsbacher was destined for a career in communicating information. Thanks to a professor in Dallas who introduced her to cognitive psychology, and to the PhD advisor at the University of Texas at Austin who steered her into a study of language processing and comprehension, that fate was realized. Today, APS Fellow and Charter Member Gernsbacher is the Sir Frederic C. Bartlett professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she investigates the cognitive processes and mechanisms that underlie language comprehension and is a highly respected expert on autism.

In January, Gernsbacher took on a new communications role when she joined APS Fellow Stephen J. Ceci, Cornell University, as co-editor of the APS journal *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, succeeding *PSPI* founding co-editor and APS Fellow and Charter Member Robert A. Bjork, University of California, Los Angeles.

"*PSPI* was launched by APS five years ago to show the public, policy makers, and our fellow scientists that psychological research is a critical societal resource," Gernsbacher said. "Both Steve and I are committed to making *PSPI* the premier forum for scientifically reviewing the important behavioral issues confronting society, and then translating what has been learned into the public arena so that this valuable research is no longer 'the best kept secret in science.'"

Making the task easier, Gernsbacher said, is that she and former APS Board Member Ceci can build upon *PSPI*'s past successes. "*PSPI* has built a solid reputation for using science to address policies and practices, interventions, methods, or claims that have gained widespread application, widespread public attention or support, or any notoriety that encourages widespread use," she explained. "*PSPI* reports have provided the public with fact-based scientific examinations of a wide

variety of subjects, including the impact of viewing violent media on children's behavior, the value of smaller classes to better learning outcomes, whether wealth is a precursor to happiness — even if ginkgo actually improves memory.”

Gernsbacher said that she and Ceci plan to keep future issues of *PSPI* the same — featuring a major commissioned article that is a “juried analysis of scientific literature that takes a stand based on the evidence and conclusions of existing research.” These analyses, she explained, are conducted by teams of accomplished scientists focusing on what psychological science has to say about topics in which there is significant public interest.

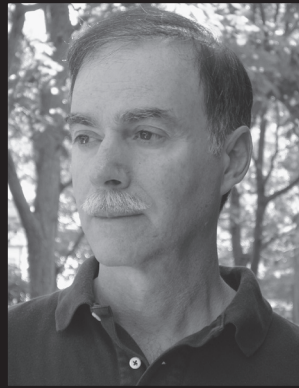
“The commissioned articles might support a particular claim or practice,” Gernsbacher said, “or they might conclude that a claim or practice either contradicts or lacks scientific evidence. Additionally, *PSPI* articles might be used to try

distinguished scholars in our field eagerly accept invitations to write *PSPI* reports is that they know an article in our journal has a good chance of being covered by the top media outlets, such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Scientific American*,” she said. (See Page 8 for more on *PSPI* articles appearing in *Scientific American*.) “*PSPI* editors have always forged strong relationships with key science writers and editors in the print and electronic media. Steve and I will not only continue to foster these alliances, but will actively look for new venues to outreach.”

Of course, the best way to ensure that *PSPI* gets noticed, Gernsbacher said, is “to commission top scholars to tackle

On Gernsbacher

founding editors Robert Bjork (left) and Stephen J. Ceci



She is one of psychology's most distinguished scientists.

She has all the attributes that *PSPI* needs to build upon its promising start.

and settle debates where there is research data supporting both sides of an issue.”

While the overall format for *PSPI* remains intact, Gernsbacher and Ceci are hoping that a new feature in the journal will increase the impact of each issue's content.

“We will include a short editorial to preface each *PSPI* article that we believe will ‘flag’ the policy implications, societal relevance, and importance of the work to the readers,” Gernsbacher said. “This is a technique that the *New England Journal of Medicine* and other journals have used for some time to successfully attract the media, policymakers, and other key persons to their papers.”

Reaching the media, Gernsbacher said, is especially critical to the success of *PSPI*. “One reason that some of the most



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Michael E. Newman has been a science writer for 20 years.

topics that keep parents, legislators, policymakers, agency heads, and scientists up at night.” Ceci agreed, noting that his new partner is extremely qualified to meet the challenge.

“The first five years for *PSPI* under the guiding eye of my former co-editor and past president of APS, Bob Bjork,

**“Most distinguished scholars
eagerly accept invitations
to write for *PSPI*,” Gernsbacher said,**

were an enormous success,” Ceci said. “As Bob steps down and is replaced by Morton, we look to a period where *PSPI* emerges as a truly high-impact journal ... perhaps one of the highest impact journals in all of the social sciences. Morton was chosen as Bob’s successor for the good reason that she has all of the scholarly, editorial, and personal attributes that *PSPI* needs to build upon its promising start.”

Bjork, University of California, Los Angeles, echoed Ceci’s assessment. “I was delighted to hear that Morton Gernsbacher had been selected to replace me as co-editor of *PSPI*,” he said. “Morty is one of our field’s most distinguished scientists. She also has served our field with distinction and generosity — as an editor and in multiple other capacities.” He called co-founding *PSPI* with Ceci a “uniquely rewarding and interesting experience. *PSPI* is near and dear to me. I am greatly comforted that its future is in Steve’s and Morty’s more-than-capable hands.”

According to Ceci, another advantage to his teaming with Gernsbacher is how well their research backgrounds blend together.

“Morton’s expertise in psycholinguistics and cognitive science complements my own work in developmental psychology,” Ceci said. “Together, we have the broad-scope ability to properly filter proposed *PSPI* topics, team members, and reviewers.”

Gernsbacher jumped at the chance to work with Ceci because “he is so highly respected as an editor, as a scientist, and as a spokesperson for psychological science. Best of all, Steve is an incredibly easy person to work with, and he has made my transition onto the *PSPI* team an easy and enjoyable process.”

Helping smooth that transition is Gernsbacher’s previous editorial background, which includes serving on the editorial boards of nine journals, as associate editor of *Cognitive Psychology*, and as editor-in-chief of *Memory and Cognition*. One lesson from that experience, Gernsbacher said, is especially important in guiding the way she approaches *PSPI*.

“When I was editor of *Memory and Cognition*, one of my overriding goals was to return that journal to the niche for which it was created,” she said. “*PSPI* has a different and equally unique niche — to address topics where psychological science may have the potential to inform and improve the well-being of society. Protecting that niche is important to me.”

Something else that Gernsbacher would like to sustain is the thrill that her new assignment as *PSPI* co-editor brings.

“Working on this journal is unlike anything that I’ve ever done before. The scope is wide, the articles are more in-depth, and the relevance to society is more poignant. Helping edit *PSPI* gives me the opportunity to learn about the breadth and depth of psychological science that my editorships of

**because “they know their article
has a good chance of being covered
by the top media outlets.”**

more focused journals did not. More importantly, I have the tremendous satisfaction that comes from raising awareness about outstanding research on behavioral and social phenomena, and then hopefully seeing that awareness translate into positive change.” ♦

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